

Ginevra

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GINEVRA

A Play of Mediæval Florence

By

EDWARD DOYLE

Author of "Cagliostro", "Moody Moments", "Laying the Hero to Rest",
"The Haunted Temple and Other Poems", and
"The Comet, a Play of Our Times"



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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

In "Ginevra" the author's aim is to depict the unique experience of the noble young Florentine matron who, prematurely buried during the Plague of 1400 A. D., escaped from the tomb only to be shunned by the living, and to make every character of the play true to the life and ideals of the Middle Ages.

He has made use of the appearance of the Crimson Cross in the heavens, to which Dante bears testimony in the "Convito," believing that the meteorological wonder with its appeal to the soul to look with hope beyond the calamities incident to human life, might serve as a compensating offset to the appalling public scourge as subject-matter for a play.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

BERNARDO AMIERI,
ANTONIO RONDINELLI,
FRANCESCO AGOLANTI,
JESTER,
} PRIEST,
} CAPTAIN OF THE BLACK COMPANY,
CHIEF ROYSTERER,
GINEVRA AMIERI,
THE MOTHER,
VULMA.

BLACK COMPANY, WHITE PENITENTS, ROYSTERERS AND
SERVANTS.

TIME.—1398-1400 A. D.

PLACE.—Florence, Italy.

GINEVRA

A C T I.

(Hall in the Amieri Palace. Tables, benches and cabinets, all richly carved. Ginevra, seated, plays softly on the lute. The Mother enters, and lifting priestly vestments, views them admiringly.)

MOTHER.

Ginevra, you have your grandmother's gift.
Like her, you make the vestments for a priest,
As though they were for a Bishop; for the Bishop,
As though they were for the Pope, and for the Pope,
As though they were for our dear Lord Himself.

GINEVRA.

Precisely.

MOTHER.

Surely, these are not the vestments
That you are making for our humble priest?

GINEVRA.

They are.

MOTHER.

Why, child, the dear good man would part
With them in a month, or less, that with the funds
He might relieve the suffering folk of Florence!

GINEVRA.

True.

MOTHER.

He has done it several times already.

GINEVRA (*ceasing to play.*)

I know it; but is he not worthy, mother,
Of finer vestments every time he sells
His altar robes to ease a human ill?

MOTHER (*with feigned displeasure*)

Oh, I suppose, remonstrance is as useless
With you, as it has always been with him!

(*She folds the vestments and puts them away. Ginevra resumes her playing on the lute.*)

Dear, is the missal done?

GINEVRA.

Not yet.

MOTHER.

Oh, dear!

(*She picks up the missal.*)

'Tis all but finished. Why not finish it?

GINEVRA.

I tried and tried this morning, but somehow
My hand had lost its cunning for the work.

MOTHER.

Dear, try again.

GINEVRA.

Wait, let me bathe my soul
In the lute's music; I shall rise refreshed.

MOTHER (*after a pause.*)

Dear, it would please me and no less delight
Your father——

GINEVRA (*rising*)

Mother! how delight my father?

He never yet has had one word of praise
For anything I did, or tried to do,
Tho' oft my heart was hungry for that word.

MOTHER.

There you are wrong, my child! Your father, dear,
Has watched your growth as closely as the sun
Watches the flower from seed to bud and bloom.
Why, dear, he has been boasting that your art
In book illumination is the finest
In Florence.

GINEVRA (*laughing softly.*)

Oh!

(*Puts lute aside.*)

MOTHER.

He brings as guest to-day
A judge of art, to show your work to him.

GINEVRA.

To-day?

MOTHER.

This morning. You need have no fear.

Your work will stand the test.

GINEVRA.

Oh, 't is not that!

MOTHER.

What then disturbs you?

GINEVRA.

Oh, I know, dear Mother,
I should have told you! but each time I tried,
My tongue clove to the roof of my parched mouth.

MOTHER.

Keep nothing from your mother. Tell me, dear!

GINEVRA.

Antonio—

MOTHER (*eagerly*)

What about him?—

GINEVRA.

Is to come

This morning and ask father to consent
To our betrothal.

MOTHER (*dropping missal*)

What! A Rondinelli!

Dissuade him; oh, dissuade him! What might happen.
I dread to think, if he should ever venture
Beneath this roof upon a quest so rash.

GINEVRA.

He cannot be dissuaded.

MOTHER.

My child, he must!

But he must!

GINEVRA.

I tried as best I could—
 With both my heart and soul in mutiny—
 But he just smiled and said: “A Christian Knight
 Performs his duty reckless of the cost.”

MOTHER.

Oh, he is noble! Truly, I could close
 My eyes in peace, were I to see you wed
 To one so worthy.—List! your father comes.
 Go, fling yourself before the Virgin’s shrine
 And beg her help in this dire hour of need.

(*Ginevra retires and her Mother picks up the missal and reads.*)

“There is no dark in life, but trust in God,
 If it step boldly, or put forth its hand,
 Will find a marble stairway to the stars,
 Or balustrade to check its headlong fall.”

BERNARDO (*entering*)

Where is Ginevra?

MOTHER (*cautiously*)

Gone to her devotions.

I have the feeling that our daughter longs
 To leave this wretched world and be a nun.

BERNARDO.

What!

MOTHER.

She has always found great happiness
 In helping those in trouble or in need;
 And, if her heart’s desire should be God’s will,
 It were not well for us to block God’s way.

BERNARDO.

Zounds! Zounds! A fine thing, truly, to allow
 A daughter's fancy foil a father's judgment!
 Instruct our daughter that she must conform
 Her will to mine. If not——there is no "not".
 The Amieri tree must bloom again
 With prominence and power, and overtop
 All other trees in Florence, as of old.

MOTHER (*with subdued voice*)

Antonio Rondinelli has fair virtues,
 And he adores Ginevra.

BERNARDO.

Rondinelli!

All his fair virtues are but candleshine
 Upon the ghastly features of my kin,
 Maimed treacherously by his hated breed.
 Speak not of him for our Ginevra's hand.

MOTHER.

I fear that few, with their ancestor's deeds
 Upon them like a garment, would look well
 In Christian company, my dear Bernardo!

BERNARDO.

I hate the Rondinellis, root and branch,
 And shall while I have hand to strike them down.

MOTHER.

And yet, Bernardo, pray we not each day:
 "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive
 The trespasses of others?"

BERNARDO.

That sounds well,

When one is on his knees petitioning Heaven,
 Or, when unhorsed—if of a craven heart—

He asks for quarter; but the Amieri
Never take quarter from the enemy;
Nor give it.

MOTHER.
Oh, our poor Ginevra!

BERNARDO.

Peace.

MOTHER.

Her life is like a taper—all you see,
Bernardo,—all that any father sees
In a fair daughter—is the dazzling beam—
The beauty that attracts the powerful.
We mothers look beneath the brilliancy
And see the taper shed away its life
In tears that, at the end, extinguish it.
Bernardo! Let me warn you ere too late,
Though gentle be our child, and soft her voice,
She has the Amieri strength of will,
And therefore, have a care whom you select
To be her husband.

BERNARDO.

Agolanti.

MOTHER.

No!

Oh, cast Ginevra in the tiger's cage!
Come, come and I will help you seize our child!

BERNARDO.

Calm your excitement. It will not avail.

MOTHER.

Oh, better for our child, if she were thrown
To the wild beasts! A momentary pang,
And all is over. I could then give thanks,
Knowing her soul at peace would smile, "Amen."

Oh, trust her not to him whom you have named,
 Bernardo, for her life would be one moan,
 One deep, prolonged death rattle in our ears!

BERNARDO.

Francesco Agolanti has the will
 As well as power to help me raise our house
 To eminence again.

MOTHER.

I loathe the man.

His eye has the sullen dullness which I dread
 As much in man as snake, while his fixed smile
 Has the cold shine of a serpent drawing near!
 My heart and soul recoil at sight of him.

BERNARDO.

Sheer fantasy!

MOTHER.

The loathing which I feel

Toward Agolanti is no fantasy,
 Bernardo, but the enmity implanted
 By God in woman's nature toward the snake
 In any of its guises whatsoever.

BERNARDO.

Francesco Agolanti has the craft
 That gains control of men and holds its power.
 It cannot be forestalled, nor circumvented,
 Nor undermined. His craft will help our house.

MOTHER.

Oh, his are hands deft but to turn the rack
 And crack the bone upon the least suspicion!

BERNARDO.

There should be no suspicion.

MOTHER.

I hope not.

BERNARDO.

Is not Ginevra duteous?

MOTHER.

As a daughter,

None more so; but as a wife, enraged by wrong
Day after day, who knows what might betide?
Hers is no soul to brook indignity.

BERNARDO.

Indignity to Amieri's child?

MOTHER.

Yes, surely, for a shameless courtesan,
Named Vulma, holds Francesco in her power;
Her wishes are Francesco's only law.

BERNARDO.

Gossip!

MOTHER.

The truth! I heard it from the lips
Of his poor wife who, dying, drew me close
And said: "Mourn not for me. I welcome death
As gladly as I welcomed my first-born."

BERNARDO.

Oh, as a woman has small weight with women
When she proclaims her husband's excellence,
So she has little claim to man's regard
When she decries her spouse with bitter tongue.

MOTHER.

My poor Ginevra! I foresee her doom.
Her young life opes before me like a grave.

BERNARDO.

What! Mother, would you hint our child might bring
Dishonor to the Amieri name?

MOTHER.

Oh, I have thoughts for which there are no words!
Such thoughts as have all mothers when they watch
The child depart forever from the home
In charge of one whom they believe a fiend.

BERNARDO.

You mount a fancy that's too wild to ride.
It bites and kicks, whirls round and rears so high,
That I must be gallant and take you down.
Let young Antonio Rondinelli come
This morning, if it is Ginevra's wish.
There shall be no dishonor to our house.

(Bernardo goes out.)

MOTHER.

Bernardo, dear Bernardo! this is well.
It is an answer to my strongest prayer
That trampled down all others in my heart
In haste to reach dear Mother Mary's ruth.

(She raises her eyes to Heaven.)

Dear Lord! I thank Thee for the change of heart
Wrought in Bernardo. For a second time
Hast Thou for Thy compassionate Mother's sake,
Changed water at a wedding into wine.

GINEVRA (*entering timidly*)

I see the answer, Mother, in your smile.

MOTHER.

Ginevra, never was a mother's heart
So sparkling full of joy as mine is now.
Your father has been gracious. He will meet
Antonio this morning, *if you wish!*

GINEVRA.

Oh, dear Antonio, I do fear his heart
Will burst with overfullness of his joy!
It is so great to me, that I half fear
To reach my hand to touch it lest it melt.

MOTHER.

Thank God, my child, from whom all blessings flow.

GINEVRA.

How thank Him fitly?

MOTHER.

By a vow, my child,
To help the poor of Florence for His sake.
Let the rejoicings of afflicted folk
Outshine all other tapers that you place
On the Madonna's shrine, and keep it burning;
For nothing is more pleasing to His sight.

GINEVRA.

I make that vow, fond mother, unto death.
Antonio will help me keep it well;
For, though in battle there be none more bold,
Or in the tourney, he takes more delight
In binding up a wound than making one.
How happy now will dear Antonio be
To learn of father's graciousness to him!
Oh, mother! mother! moth——(*laughs hysterically.*)

MOTHER.

Why laugh so, child?

GINEVRA.

How help but laugh, dear mother, when I think
Of dear Antonio's amazement, when
He comes this morning with set face and doubt
To scale the fortress of my father's frown,
And finds there is no fortress here at all!
Oh! here Antonio comes. What noble mien!

ANTONIO (*entering*)

Ginevra!

GINEVRA.

Dear Antonio, come here!

(she leads him toward her mother)

Salute our Mother. You are now her son.

ANTONIO.

My Mother, long, in sooth.

MOTHER.

God grant you peace,

My children. I am proud to call you son,

Antonio.

ANTONIO (*taking out ring*)

This was my mother's ring,

Bestowed at her betrothal.

MOTHER (*in alarm*)

Wait, oh, wait!

Slight not your father by a plighted troth,

Before he hath vouchsafed you his approval

With all the due formality himself.

He will return soon; he expects a guest.

(Mother goes out.)

Ginevra, call me when your father comes.

ANTONIO.

Dear, tell me how this joy has come to pass.

GINEVRA.

The wonder worker was my mother.

ANTONIO.

How?

GINEVRA.

Who can explain a miracle? The blind
Obtain the vision of the beautiful;

The deaf, the joy of music. That is all
 That can be said of father's change of heart.
 It is, it is! Antonio, it is!
 And in enjoying it I am content.

ANTONIO.

I am content. Dear, ever since I twined
 The garland on that most memorial May
 And crowned you queen amid the realmng shout,
 I saw this day descending down the heavens
 To take command of all the sun-plumed troop.

GINEVRA.

And since that day, my dear Antonio,
 My thought, my dream, weal, woe and hope of Heaven,
 And night and morning prayer have been for you.

*(Enter jester with a donkey's head on his arm, who at the sight
 of Antonio whines like a dog. Antonio shows ring and takes
 no heed of the jester.)*

ANTONIO.

No queen, dear, has so rich and rare a ring.
 My mother, dying, bade me take it off
 Her finger, and to keep it for the bride
 Worthy to wear it. It shall never deck
 Another finger, dear; for doubly blest
 By being worn by two so virtuous,
 Its sparkle shall be lidded, like your eyes
 Within the casket sacred to your sleep.

JESTER.

Ha—ha! ha—ha! A ring for my mistress, not free and clear,
 for there is a mortgage upon it held by a skeleton. Look here,
 gallant Antonio, you have a jester in your castle whose neck you
 should have broken before he was born, and I bear you a grudge
 for not having done your duty on that occasion. Have you come
 here to prove my master's contention that the Rondinelli Castle

can boast of a greater fool than I am? Ha—ha! Ha—ha! ha—ha—ha!

ANTONIO.

Fool, why are you so merry this morning?

JESTER.

Merry! Ha—ha! There was never a man merry since Adam lost his rib.

(Enter Bernardo with Francesco. The company curtsy to each other.)

ANTONIO.

Messer Bernardo Amieri, peace
On both our houses. Hate, that like a hawk,
Has brooded over them for lustres long,
And hatched out only talons and fierce beaks,
Has flown forever. In its place sits love,
A bird of golden crest and songful throat,
The melody of whose prolific brood
Will show the sun the way to earth at dawn,
And keep him lingering in the West at eve.

BERNARDO.

The Rondinelli tongue was always glib,
Which takes with women better than with men.

JESTER.

A man's proper tongue is his sword, say I.
Ha—ha!

ANTONIO.

Truly, sir, were a lightning bolt to turn
Into a snow-white dove in its descent
From the black cloud, and perch upon my roof,
Far less were I astounded at the sight
Than at your glorious change of heart toward me,
Shown by your countenancing my love at last
For fair Ginevra. Oh, till this rapt hour,
Little dreamed I how poor, indeed, are words

As the ambassadors of gratitude!
 They seem shipwrecked of all the wealth of heart
 With which they had been laden, leaving port.

FRANCESCO (*ignoring Antonio*)

Your artistry, however beautiful,
 Ginevra, has a rival in yourself.

(*Her reply is a look of surprise.*)

JESTER (*taunting Antonio*)

Ha—ha! ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha! If your words had a rat's
 sense in them, they would never venture on a sea broader than
 an arm's length. Ha—ha!

BERNARDO.

Get to your kennel.

JESTER.

First, give me my bone. If I am a dog, I am entitled to a
 bone, and I stand on my rights. There's not to be two fools in
 the house as long as I am master.

BERNARDO.

Begone!

JESTER.

My bone, my bone! All Florence for my bone! The bone
 that's to my relish is Rondinelli's departure from this house with
 break-neck speed. I want him to fetch his absence here by
 flying hence with the haste of a devil scalded by holy water.

(*Ginevra lifts up her finger at the jester who slinks away, and
 with his back turned to her laughs in low tone*)

Ha—ha! ha—ha—! ha—ha—ha!

BERNARDO (*changing intention suddenly*)

Ginevra!—Tell your mother that our guest,
 Francesco Agolanti, has arrived,
 And that we share one thirst which we would slake.

(*Ginevra bows and withdraws. Bernardo turns to Antonio.*)

Now, Rondinelli, few shall be my words.
 A stripling, having hurt his friend in play,
 Sought pardon of the father for the harm.
 In answer, he was seized and had his hand
 Put on a block and chopped off at the wrist.
 This stripling was an Amieri youth ;
 His mutilator was a Rondinelli.

ANTONIO.

That happened many generations back.

BERNARDO.

You know it, knave ! and yet you dare to cross
 The Amieri threshold. Villain, die !

(Draws his sword and makes a lunge at Antonio, who parries the blow. Fool leaps with delight at the sight of his master's flashing sword.)

ANTONIO *(handing sword back to Bernardo, whom he has disarmed)*

Your life is haloed by Ginevra's love.
 I am not sacrilegious in my heat.

BERNARDO *(refusing sword)*

What ! To a Rondinelli owe my sword ?

ANTONIO.

A filial act, due to your reverend years.

(Lays the sword aside.)

BERNARDO *(to Francesco)*

And you stand idly by and lift no hand
 To save the Amieri house from shame ?
 Oh, twenty generations cannot scour
 This black dishonor to the house's head
 From its escutcheon ! And you, younger, too,
 Than I by twice ten years ! And you, the man

Who would espouse my child to bring our house
 Defenders of its honor for all time!
 I thought we shared "one thirst?"

FRANCESCO.

And so we do.

I wanted to see you, tho' thrice his years,
 To have the glory of dispatching him
 Without another's help; not that, indeed,
 There is much glory even for tottering age
 To kick out of his way so vile a cur.

ANTONIO.

Francesco Agolanti, you presume,
 Knowing that you are sheltered——

FRANCESCO.

Sheltered? fie!

ANTONIO.

Sheltered, you villain, by the fact you know
 I love Ginevra, and on her account
 That I decline to crimson now afresh
 This ancient palace floor which, to the mind
 That sees beneath its gloss from Time's long dance,
 Looks like a fresco fallen from the wall.

FRANCESCO.

"Decline", of course! What else could one expect
 From a vile Rondinelli? There!

(Throws glove in Antonio's face. Antonio kicks it and draws his sword. The jester jumps with joy as the fight becomes fiercer.)

JESTER.

Have at him, Francesco! There you miss and now again. By the spirit of Cæsar, I could do better than that with this donkey's head. Dispatch him with one thrust! That is all that is needed,

if it be of the right heft and proper direction. Strike when I tell you, for no one can direct a battle like a fool that isn't in it. Have it your way, then! I can enjoy the fiercest battle, so long as my body is out of the reach of a jab.

(Ginevra enters and rushes between Antonio and her father, who is about to plunge his sword in her lover's back. He dashes Ginevra aside and fells Antonio with his sword thrust. Ginevra shields Antonio from further blows by falling on his body.)

MOTHER (*entering*)

Oh, in the name of God! What have you done?
Another awful crime upon this house!

GINEVRA (*weeping and going out*)

A priest! A priest! He must not die unshriven.

BERNARDO (*presenting Francesco*)

Mother, Francesco Agolanti, whom
I have selected to espouse our daughter.

MOTHER.

Evil betides the marriage, when, like this,
It is without God's blessing. Spare our child!

BERNARDO.

Blood calls for blood. It is a father's right
To use precaution lest his daughter stain
The honor of the house with wish or deed.
There, her temptation lies, a lifeless dog!

(Points to Antonio's body and Ginevra enters with the priest before whom Bernardo and Francesco stand threateningly.)

BERNARDO (*to priest*)

You are too late to shrive the treacherous wretch,
But you come timely to perform an office
More to our temper, Priest.

PRIEST (*lifting cross*)

The Crucifix!

Make way for it, or ask not for its mercy,

When death's white shadow falls upon your face.

(*They move aside, awe-struck. Antonio stirs and speaks, weak of voice.*)

ANTONIO.

I die content. Oh, better thus to go

Than harm a hair, Ginevra, of your sire.

The blow were parricidal by *my* hand.

Nor shall your blush take color from one stain

Shed by my hand upon your palace floor.

PRIEST.

Son, turn your thoughts toward Heaven.

BERNARDO (*beckoning to servants and pointing to Antonio*)

Out with the dog!

(*They carry Antonio out and prevent the priest and Ginevra from following.*)

Priest, join Francesco and my daughter!

GINEVRA.

Father!

My heart and soul Antonio possesses,

And they can not be taken from his keep.

BERNARDO.

Ha! Not amiss then was the blow that felled him.

The honor of our house has been preserved.

GINEVRA (*falling on her knees before Francesco*)

Francesco Agolanti—on my knees

I plead for mercy—mercy on your honor

No less than mine because, compelled to wed,

I never can be other than a corpse;

A blind, deaf charnel thing whom you will loathe!

MOTHER.

Oh, that a child of mine should have to plead
 For mercy, and I helpless! Would she were
 Within the convent's shelter, or the grave!

BERNARDO.

Unite them, Priest!

PRIEST.

I cannot marry them.

BERNARDO.

What!

PRIEST.

There must be consent on part of both.

BERNARDO.

This is no time to trifle. Marry them
 This instant; or, by Heaven! I'll drive this sword
 Into your carcass.

PRIEST.

Be it so. Death swings
 Open but once, and, whether soon or late,
 Matters but little to a soul prepared.
 Strike! I am ready.

MOTHER (*rushing before priest and addressing Bernardo*)
 No, no, no! Strike me!

But add not to this house's many crimes
 The sacrilege of shedding saintly blood.

BERNARDO (*pushing her aside*)

Woman, away!

MOTHER (*dropping on her knees before priest*)
 One boon I crave—your blessing.

PRIEST (*blessing her*)

There, daughter.

MOTHER.

Oh, the blessing that I crave
Is that you spare this house from further guilt.
Let Prudence rule.

BERNARDO (*to priest*)
Decide!

PRIEST.

I have decided.

MOTHER.

Oh!

PRIEST.

Daughter, I rejoice that I am called
By God to be His witness of the truth.

MOTHER.

Oh, for the generations of this house
As yet unborn, whose little voices plead
With mine for mercy, like a cloistered choir,
I now beseech you! oh, good Priest! good Priest!

(*She continues her appeal in vehement, subdued tone.*)

PRIEST.

How can I, daughter? It would be no marriage,
But profanation of the sacred rite.

BERNARDO.

Up from your knees, Ginevra, 'tis my will.

GINEVRA.

No, father, never! Strike me with your sword,
And I will take it as a kindly deed,
And bless you for it with my parting breath.

MOTHER (*in desperation*)

Bernardo Amieri! Spare our child.

BERNARDO (*seizing Ginevra by the wrist and drawing her toward the priest*)

Unite them, and have done with idle speech.

(*Francesco looks on with his fixed, sardonic smile and the mother, burying her face in her hands, weeps convulsively.*)

C U R T A I N .

GINEVRA

A C T II.

(Two years later when Florence is stricken by the Plague. The Loggia of the Agolanti palace. The White Penitents are aroused from their slumber by the tolling of the bell, and decorously march off chanting a litany.)

JESTER (*entering*)

Ha, ha! ha—ha—ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha!

FRANCESCO (*entering in alarm*)

Is the plague in the palace?

JESTER.

Not yet, good Master. It has probably delayed its visit until it could be sure that you were at home.

FRANCESCO (*sharply*)

Where is your mistress, Ginevra?

JESTER.

By all accounts, good Master, my mistress Ginevra is out in the highways and byways of Florence, giving the angels a hand at their work.

FRANCESCO.

Fool, why did you toll the bell?

JESTER.

For the best reason that a fool ever had—to put his master at ease. All night long those whitewashed rascals that have come down like locusts from the North, kept me awake droning their "Misericordia." I ordered them away. "Where is your master?" said they. "Out with the roysterers," answered I. "He is on the headlong road to hell," said they. "Don't follow his example," answered I. "We won't," said they, and they sprawled everywhere they could put their bodies. If their drone was bad, it was nothing to their snore in chorus, and I tolled the bell that you, reaching home from your frolic, might snatch a wink of sleep.

FRANCESCO.

Fool, don't you know that the tolling of the bell is a signal for the Black Company to come?

JESTER.

Let them come. It will do their hearts good that there is no dead one here to carry to the Lazaretto.

FRANCESCO.

Here they are.

(Enter Black Company.)

CAPTAIN (*after looking around*)

Where is the dead whom you would have us bury?

FRANCESCO.

It was the fool who tolled the bell.

CAPTAIN.

Mad sport,

Francesco Agolanti, when the Plague
Is falling like sharp hail on every house
And whitening the city like the Alps!
God grant that you need not our service soon.

(Black Company goes out, and Francesco seizes Jester by the neck.)

FRANCESCO.

I have the will to wring your neck off, wretch!

JESTER (*escaping*)

Look here, master! Let me tell you something. The Plague belongs to the Guild and enjoys the reputation of doing its work very well. It does not need your help to depopulate Florence. Ha—ha!

(The roysterers are heard singing.)

FRANCESCO.

It bodes ill for the black-cowled Company
 To make a visit to a festive house.
 'T is like Death looking in and whispering, "Next."
 Fool, call the servants. Bid them fetch the wine—
 A cask of it—the best vernaccio!
 Here come my friends to help me drown the Plague.

JESTER.

Ha—ha! ha—ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha!

FRANCESCO.

Hurry, fool, hurry. I have a bursting head.
 (Jester picks up stuffed donkey's head, which has been dropped
 in the scuffle.)

JESTER.

I must have my donkey's head, Master. It is my birthright and
 royal prerogative, and I have more sense than to abdicate the
 throne for even two minutes in favor of next of kin.

FRANCESCO.

Be off! . No time for this.

(Seizes donkey's head from Jester and dashes it on the floor.)

JESTER (*picking it up again*)

I need this donkey's head more than you, Master, for you have
 one already, and if I should leave this you would then have two.
 Ha—ha! (Goes out.)

FRANCESCO.

Oh! how endure this damnable existence
 In Florence for a day, or even an hour,
 But for the anti-God, born of the grape,
 Who comes to our relief!—Friends, welcome! welcome!
 (Enter a dozen roysterers, one of them, Vulma, richly attired, and
 all join in a song of the period. Servants come in with wine.)

VULMA.

A toast, Francesco! One to fire the blood
Till its bright flare defends us from all pests.

SEVERAL VOICES.

Toast!

FRANCESCO.

Wine that breaks in laughter at the mouth
At thought of death—wine in whose crimson depths,
We make a merry merman world of life
Afar from sight and sound of human ill—
Wine, where the long lost sunshine of the sky
And radiance of the yet unrisen suns
Become Love's ravishing lips, that press our mouths
And breathe to being all our wildest dreams,
And then immune us happy from all harm!

(They applaud and all drain their glasses except the Chief Roysterer, who looks reflective. The Jester, entering, snatches the Roysterer's glass and drinks its contents.)

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

May that choke you.

JESTER.

Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha!

(Jester takes two glasses of wine from the servants and presents them to the Chief Roysterer.)

JESTER.

Here, take these two glasses for that one.

(He withdraws the glasses and drains them himself, whereupon the Chief Roysterer goes to the board and, lifting a decanter, puts it to his mouth, causing general laughter.)

VULMA *(coquettishly)*

Your wine is good, Francesco, but your toast
Could be improved on. Is it only wine
You think about, fond lover? Only wine?

Has wine disfigured, in a jealous fit,
Her fairer rival in your heart and mind?

FRANCESCO.

Oh, Woman more than wine, but for whose beauty——

JESTER.

—There never would have been an ass in the world and, in faith, hell would never have had an inhabitant, except the Devil. Ha—ha!

FRANCESCO.

Her beauty is the sun above the world——

JESTER.

You are right, good Master; and if I were a Joshua, I would command the sun to stand high in heaven forever—that the battle between man and man might go on without end. Ha—ha!

(*They laugh uproariously.*)

FRANCESCO.

Refill your glasses. Now, we drink to Woman.

(*They drink.*)

JESTER.

If woman, the fruit of Adam's body, had remained crude in him, and not ripened and fallen to the earth—what would be the outcome? There would have been no outcome at all, and that should end the matter—but it doesn't. The schoolmen pick up a question where the fool lets it drop, and therefore you will have to go to them for an answer to the problem—If woman had remained to this day simply as a bone in Adam, what kind of a bone would it be? *Cui bono or pro bono publico?*

(*They laugh uproariously and Francesco, seizing the Jester, places him on the table. They crowd around the Jester and do not observe Ginevra, who enters from the door, grave of countenance and in hospital attire.*)

FRANCESCO.

A sermon, fool!

COMPANY (*in chorus*)

A sermon by the fool!

JESTER.

I shall, faith, and I will not be the first fool in the pulpit to address his brethren. Now, don't put me down for a dull preacher, if the smell of your wine gets into my homily and sets you snoring like the White Penitents. (*They laugh. He fixes his gaze on Vulma and points at her.*) First, my homage to the lady of the house. I know her by the gems in her hair and brooch on her breast, and above all, by that ring on her first finger that should have been on the third. (*The Jester sees Ginevra and darts down from the table and out.*) Ha—ha! ha—ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha!

VULMA (*excited with wine*)

Yes, yes; the fool is right, Francesco—right!
Having your heart and every jewel prized
By haughty Amieri, even the ring
That flaunted in your face her paramour—
I am the mistress here, and yet am not.

FRANCESCO.

Your will has way with me in everything.

VULMA.

Then, give me the possession of this palace
That I, henceforth, may queen it openly.

FRANCESCO.

Be patient, Vulma. If I could look over
Plague's shoulder at the lengthy scroll he holds,
I might find there a name that would read well;
For she, Ginevra, follows close to him
Thro' Florence, in the vain attempt to snatch
His victims and to wash his mark from them.
He may get angry at her impudence.

VULMA.

It must be now, Francesco, see! To foil
The Plague if it touch me. This may be put
To other purpose, if you halt half way.

(Shows dagger.)

FRANCESCO.

Ginevra has no issue.

VULMA.

That you know.

FRANCESCO.

Her dower which you have helped me to enjoy
Can be two-thirds reclaimed. Wait till the Plague
Exhausts its roster; for the father, too,
May be among the drafted. In that case
There is no claimant for the lost two-thirds
To worry me a moment.

VULMA.

Still you halt.

Install me in the palace, Agolanti,
With the due honors, and, before nightfall,
I shall unearth to your blind sight a truth
Which Florence, under breath, for many a month,
Has whispered where you passed with peacock strut,
As tho' you also had the peacock's eyes.

FRANCESCO.

What! I the butt of any jest in Florence?

VULMA.

Where is Antonio Rondinelli?

FRANCESCO.

Cloistered!

VULMA.

Cloistered indeed, and most luxuriously
Beneath this roof.

GINEVRA (*stepping forth and starting the company*)

A falsehood! by the Mother
Of Sorrows, I declare these words are false!

FRANCESCO.

Ha! That explains the mystery. Who else
Had provocation but Antonio
To have our marriage questioned by the Church?
I now know who induced you to invoke
The Holy Office.

GINEVRA.

I?

FRANCESCO.

Deny it not,
You lily with an adder coiled within!

GINEVRA.

A priest, sent by the Bishop, questioned me
About what happened on our marriage day,
And said I would hear further in due time.

FRANCESCO (*gloating*)

But you have not heard further! Nor shall you!
For, to relieve your keen anxiety,
And drown the dreams that keep you wide awake
Night long, like howling dogs that want a bone,
Let me inform you that the marriage holds.
Ha! I could quote good Scripture to the point:
"Whom God has joined let no man put asunder."

GINEVRA (*with a sigh*)

I am your wife until Death do us part.

FRANCESCO.

Begone, I have some friends to entertain.

GINEVRA.

Francesco, for your soul's sake and the thirst
Of God Himself for your salvation, cease
This demon work! Disband these revellers!

VULMA (*impudently*)

Who is this mansion's mistress—she or I?

GINEVRA (*ignoring Vulma*)

Francesco, let this woman keep the gems
But go her way.

VULMA (*laughing*)

Ha! Even keep this ring?

GINEVRA.

No, I except that ring, which I thought lost.

FRANCESCO (*with grim irony*)

Aye, which you then bemoaned, and for a month
Sought from the roof to cellar, as a cat
Her kitten, taken from her to be drowned.

GINEVRA.

Perhaps so. Will you not return that ring?

FRANCESCO.

Never.

GINEVRA.

That ring must be interred with me!

FRANCESCO.

And give Antonio an eternal laugh
At my blind folly? Have the Florentines
Not meat enough for mirth?

GINEVRA.

Mirth? More for tears.

FRANCESCO.

Meat that left over from the board to-day
 Would taste as well served cold in after years.

GINEVRA.

The ring, Francesco—I must have the ring.

FRANCESCO.

Never.

GINEVRA.

No other favor have I sought—
 At least not since the day upon my knees
 I begged for mercy on yourself and me
 That I be not compelled to wed, for, with my soul
 Departed, how be other than a corpse?

FRANCESCO.

Off! blind, deaf charnel thing whom I do loathe!
(Seizes her arm with savage grasp)
 But stay! Where are you hiding *him*? Bring me
 Where he is lurking that this glaring sword
 May slake its tiger throat and give me peace.

GINEVRA (*wincing*)

I know not where he is, or *if* he is.
 The last I saw of poor Antonio,
 Was when they dragged his bleeding body out
 And would not let the holy priest shrive him.

FRANCESCO (*lifting sword*)

Die, hideous liar! nor shall a priest shrive you!

GINEVRA (*falling on her knees*)

Francesco, ere you strike, one parting word!
 If the good God permit, I shall return
 And show you by a wonder and strange sign

How foully I have been defamed in Florence.
This is my earnest prayer, and God will grant
My heart cry.

FRANCESCO (*turning to Vulma*)

Vulma, you shall prove your charge.

Speak!

VULMA (*dropping into a seat*)

I am deathly ill.

FRANCESCO.

Look at her arm!

(*They uncover her arm.*)

ROYSTERERS (*in chorus*)

The spot is on it!

FRANCESCO (*to Jester, and hurrying out*)

Toll the bell.

(*Jester tolls bell and Roysterers rush out.*)

VULMA (*rising and following them*)

Wait, wait!

Oh, help me out of this accursed place!

What, oh, my friends, are you abandoning me?

I am abandoned! God! I am abandoned!

(*Falls on the floor and lifts her dagger. Ginevra approaches and seizes the weapon.*)

GINEVRA.

Oh, fly not in the face of God, poor soul!

(*Hastens indoors.*)

VULMA

Let me cut out the spot upon my arm.

That spot there is the Plague. Oh, cut it out!

There is no hope while that is on my arm.

Oh, give me back the dagger! Let me end

This torment!—O, you worse than thief—You fiend—

To steal my only hope to cheat the Plague!

GINEVRA (*returning with water and sponge, which she applies.*)

Put trust in God; for oh, the farther off
From every human hope, the nearer Him.
Pray.

VULMA.

I? Too late!

GINEVRA.

Never too late; for mercy,
Although Archangel, dwells not in High Heaven
Among the glorified, but on the earth
Among the wretched who implore reprieve.

VULMA.

What torture! Ease this pain! Relieve this pang!
Where is Francesco? Has he left me, too?
Fie for his jewels! they are demon eyes!
But oh, this ring—I cannot part with that.

(Enter Black Company chanting a hymn. They place Vulma on the litter, and when they are about to start, she rises from her prone posture and addresses Ginevra.)

Remove it from my finger! Would to God
I could thus take my falsehood off your name!

(Ginevra takes ring and puts it on her finger. The Black Company carry Vulma out, whereupon Bernardo enters with his wife.)

MOTHER (*with trembling voice*)

Ginevra! Sure that it was you they fetched
From out the palace gate, I bade them halt
And raise the cover.

GINEVRA (*sighing*)

Would it were!

MOTHER.

We came

To be with you that all might die together;
For there is no escape, go where we will.

No breeze from East, from West, from North or South,
But comes here freighted with the pestilence
As it was wont with fragrance from the vines.

GINEVRA.

I feel no terror, mother! it is gone.
Oh, there are worse afflictions than the Plague!

BERNARDO.

Where is Francesco?

GINEVRA.

Fled, a fugitive,
The moment that his friend was stricken down.

BERNARDO.

What friend, that he should have deserted you?

GINEVRA.

A woman whom he brought here to preside
Over his revels and—father! *to unearth*
The secret cloister of my paramour,
Antonio, within this palace!

BERNARDO.

What!

GINEVRA.

She said all Florence knew that it was so,
And he believed her; for he raised his sword
To strike me—which I wish he had—God knows!—
When I declared the woman's words were false.

MOTHER.

I knew it would be thus when I opposed
The cursed alliance.

BERNARDO.

By the living God,

Francesco will pay dearly for the slur
He casts upon the honor of our house,
Without just cause! Where is your master, fool?

JESTER (*entering*)

In the ark, by this time, if he isn't winded. He heard Noah calling aloud for a good specimen of an ass. Ha—ha! ha—ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha! My master, sensible man that he is, prefers an ass's stall, or even a rat hole, in the ark, to the deluge which has shifted from Palestine to Florence and left the rainbow behind it. Ha—ha! ha—ha! ha—ha!

MOTHER (*in alarm*)

Bernardo! See Ginevra's face!

BERNARDO (*approaching daughter*)
Ginevra!

(*He catches her as she swoons and the Mother applies the customary remedies.*)

FRANCESCO (*returning cautiously*)

What! also fair Ginevra, my pure wife?

BERNARDO (*bitterly*)

Yes, "also"!

MOTHER.

Yes, and your *pure* wife, whose life
Was light perpetual at the Virgin's shrine.

BERNARDO.

You dastard! you shall answer for your deed.

FRANCESCO (*to Mother*)

See if the dread spot is upon her arm.

MOTHER (*uncovering Ginevra's arm*)

Look! there it is! The Plague! Oh!

FRANCESCO.

Toll the bell!

(*Francesco goes to bell and tolls it. The Jester plucks flowers and makes a wreath.*)

MOTHER (*kneeling*)

O Father! unto Thee do I return
 The child Thou gavest me that she might know,
 Love, serve Thee; nor with less a mother's joy
 Do I return her, than when I received.
 Lord! Thou whose glorious life it is to lower
 Upon the earth to help those stricken blind
 With sin, or grief, or death, to reach the height
 Above the clouds that mystify this life,
 Touch my poor child's dark eyes, that she have sight
 Which is the soul's ascension into Heaven.

BERNARDO (*raising her*)

Come, poor Ginevra's spirit is at peace.
 'T is perilous, if we stay longer here.

MOTHER (*returning to Ginevra*)

Ginevra, oh, Ginevra! oh, my child!
 My baby born anew and in my arms!
 My nursling at the breast, with round red mouth
 Open, as are your eyes with sparkle, when
 Between your sips you look up in my face,
 Like a wee birdie drinking at the spring!

BERNARDO (*touching her arm*)

Come, come!

MOTHER.

My darling, I behold again
 Your consciousness reflect your mother first
 And broaden till it mirrors all the world!
 Again, a toddler, you stray far from home
 Into a graveyard where you fall asleep.
 Oh, that again I could wake you, my child,
 And bring you home rejoicing—that again
 You might say: "I will go away no more!"

BERNARDO.

Come!

MOTHER.

Let me shut her eyes and fold her hands.
 My daughter! oh, my daughter! There you smile
 Upon me in your first Communion dress
 Which you yourself embroidered! For your skill
 At needlework was marvellous and matched
 Your rubrics in the missal in your hand.

BERNARDO.

Come!

MOTHER.

Oh, my only child brought forth alive!
 My joy, my hope, my comfort! My Ginevra
 Who, grown a woman ere I was aware,
 Was dragged forth to her marriage, as a lamb
 Is dragged forth to its slaughter!

(Chanting of Black Company is heard.)

BERNARDO.

Here they come.

MOTHER.

Ginevra! Oh, Ginevra! Just one word
 To your poor mother! Oh, just one for those
 That she was wont to murmur night and morn,
 While yet you slept unconscious of her love;
 For now you are the Mother, she, the child—
 The mother over her to guide her soul,
 And help her tear-blind, tottering flesh to stand
 And not fall prone.

BERNARDO.

Come!

MOTHER *(kissing Ginevra)*

Oh, if but this kiss

Upon your brow, cheek, mouth and your closed eyes
 Could be eternal! Must it be the last?

(She is forced away from Ginevra's body by Bernardo as the Black Company enters. The Captain falls on his knees and then speaks in a loud voice)

CAPTAIN.

Lord! if upon this soul there still remain
A shadow to detain it from Thy presence,
For only purity without a speck
Can enter where Thou art in Thy full glory,
The guilt is mine, and mine should be the pain.
I was this soul's confessor, and the power
And grace bestowed me by Thy Holy Church
Never gave me such beatific joy
As when Ginevra was my penitent;
For, from her girlhood to her marriage day
Her mind and heart, a lily and a rose,
Had only richest fragrance to confess.
If stain thereafter fell upon this soul,
The guilt is mine, O Lord! in that I sinned
Against the Light in not defending her
And taking from Thy hands the martyr's crown.
Oh, keenly I repent, and trust, good Lord!
My humble service to the sick and dead
Will find acceptance by Thy clemency
In expiation of my grievous fault.

JESTER (*putting a garland on Ginevra's head.*)

It would never do for the *real* lady of the house to go out without a wreath on her head.

(*The Captain rises and begins a hymn which the Company take up as they carry Ginevra's body away on the litter. The Jester throws away the donkey's head and his cap and bells and falls on his face with a groan.*)

JESTER.

O Plague! I could forgive you for coming here, if you had only spared my mistress. You might have taken all the rest of Florence, but you should have spared her. O Plague, cruel Plague! You have made an orphan of me and left me without a friend in the world. Who else will ever peep under my motley

I
merriment—the cloak that I throw over my deformity—and sigh to see there a crushed human heart? (*Moans and then rises.*) Oh, I shall eat no more, nor drink, but will go to my lady's tomb like a faithful dog and never be driven away. Oh, yes, a watch-dog I shall be at her tomb, for my mistress, Ginevra, has the dazzling ring on her finger, and the robbing of graves is a common thing these days. I can watch as well inside the tomb as outside, and besides, if I should nap, even my faintest snore within the sepulchre would be enough to put the boldest ghoul of them to flight. Ha—ha! (*Hurries off.*)

C U R T A I N .

GINEVRA

ACT III.

(A large, dark vault with door on the left, and outside the thoroughfare is shaded by the campanile of a church. It is midnight and the Jester approaches the vault door.)

ESTER.

Now I shall enter my lady's tomb, and with my eye on her ring, I shall stand over her body without fatigue, as though I were the marble statue of an angel. *(He tries the door and shakes his head.)* What a pity it is that I was not brought up a sexton! Oh, that the angel who helped the Marys to roll away the stone of old, would only give me a hand! *(Looking around he spies an iron bar and pries the door with it. He hears the Black Company chanting in the distance and hurries at his work, effecting an opening large enough to squeeze through in time to escape discovery. He crouches in the tomb and the Black Company halts.)*

CAPTAIN.

One boon, dear brethren, suffer me to ask,
Great as the need of haste is in our toil;
'T is that whenever you approach this tomb,
You kneel and pray in silence for the soul
Whose fleshly shade here dwindleth into dust,
And, in atonement for my grievous fault,
You chant the *Stabat Mater* for my peace.

(They kneel, are silent a few moments, and then sing, the Captain leading. At the conclusion of the hymn they continue their march. The Jester works his way out through the door and picks up the tool.)

ESTER.

I threw away the donkey's head, but retained his brain, or I would have taken this tool in with me. I could have been working all the time that they were praying and chanting their hymn, and they would never have been the wiser. Oh, truly, the difference between a wise man and a fool is that the fool throws away his wisdom and the wise man keeps it to himself like the itch. What

a breeze! It is worth a baker's dozen of kingdoms on a night like this. (*Opens the door and is startled by the crimson light from the cross which now appears in the sky.*) Where is that flame from? Has the city taken fire from the blaze of the plague rubbish which lights up the streets wherever you go? (*Comes out and looks up.*) No, no. A Crimson Cross? Oh, if I could only wake up my mistress to see that cross in the air without a dome to hold it. It is a blood-red cross, like the one in the missal which she gave me to take to Antonio Rondinelli, though ten million times larger. Who knows but that it is my mistress, Ginevra, who now illuminates the night like a missal with her powers increased ten million fold on high? Ah, truly, I was meant for a troubadour, but brought up to the trade of a fool. (*Re-enters tomb and, hearing Ginevra sigh, he looks up and around and speaks in a trembling voice.*) Peace, gentle lady! I forgot my promise to Rondinelli—to tell him of your death. I will now go and tell him—that you have departed this life—and that you are now—at re-st—in—the—tomb.

(*He hurries away. There is a red glow in the tomb and in the thoroughfare from the cross in the sky. Ginevra stirs, lifts her hand to her brow and feels about her. She rises to a sitting posture and glares around. She takes the wreath off her head and, gazing at it, screams faintly.*)

GINEVRA.

God! Can it be that I am dead? entombed?
It is a funeral wreath. Help! Mother! Father!

(*She endeavors to get off the bier.*)
My feet are fastened. Is this Purgatory
Where I must suffer for my frailties?
If so it be, no murmur shall I make,
Except the prayer: "God grant me swift release."
How strange this light! Is it the rays of Heaven
Made warmly crimson by the Saviour's heart
Through which they pass to souls that suffer here?
But, am I dead? I smell the charnel damp.
I feel this wreath and break it, and I see

The red glow of the place, the open door
And, oh, I drink thy breezes, O my God,
As tho' they were Thy spirit, mouth to mouth!
Am I deranged, or dreaming? Oh, my heart
Throbs like a wounded bird within the hand,
And what a nightfall is my brow with dew!

(Having felt her heart and head, she bends over to release her feet, but is soon fatigued.)

Help! Would my limbs were loosened from this weight
That I might reach the door and cry aloud!
For Florence surely then would have one ear,
Of all its thousands, which would hark and heed.
Oh, I am like a murdered body, cast
Into the river with a mass of stone
About it to make sure that it would sink,
Never to rise! This is Francesco's work.
God knows I was a faithful wife to him,
That never did I let a thought, or dream,
About the noble one, Antonio,
Become a hope, or wish. God! grant me grace
Unto the end which cannot be far off,
That I may smear not with the faintest breath
The crystal of my duty as a wife,
Although I spoke the word with absent soul
And felt the altar there a blasphemy.

(The chanting of the White Penitents is heard in the distance.)

Ah, hope at last! Here come the Penitents.
O God! again I thank Thee for Thy breeze
Which gives me strength and voice to hail for help.

(The White Penitents pass along the street chanting the "Misericordia.")

Help, help, kind souls! Release me from this tomb.
(The Penitents halt and look bewildered.)

Help! help me for the sake of Him who, when
Expiring on the cross, cried out aloud:
"My God! my God! Hast Thou forsaken Me?"

LEADER (*to Penitents*)

An evil spirit! Heed it not. Pass on.

(*The Penitents resume their march, chanting.*)

GINEVRA.

God! is there then no one to heed my moan?

Am I beyond the reach of human help,

Tho' scarce five paces from the open door?

(*She bends over and looks down on the floor.*)

Oh, little brown earth-worm, so slow of creep,

Thou yet shalt reach the door, but never I! (*Weeps.*)

God, take from me this longing to invoke

The name of fair and fond Antonio;

For, if I only were to whisper it,

And Florence were a ceaseless thunder roar,

I know that he would hear and haste to me,

And free me from this most appalling doom.

God! grant me strength to break this band, for, oh!

A few steps to the open door, and then

I am among the living once again.

(*She endeavors to unfasten the band and, after a protracted struggle, succeeds at the point of exhaustion. She lets herself down from the bier and, after standing a moment, totters and falls in a swoon. Meanwhile Antonio is seen approaching the tomb.*)

ANTONIO (*entering the tomb*)

Adorable Ginevra! is it thus

I find your body? They have flung it down,

As tho' it were the carcase of a dog!

Oh, faithful soul! the ring is on your finger,

And it shall stay forever in your keep.

(*Bends over and is about to kiss her brow, but stands up with a shudder.*)

No, no! It must not be. No lure of flesh

Drew me to fair Ginevra when alive,

But her pure spirit; and, now that she is dead,

To touch her cheek or forehead with my lips,

Would be a deed akin to sacrilege.

(He lifts her body from the floor and rearranges wreath on her brow.)

Oh, if my bosom were thy bier, dear love!

How then my eyes would find eternal peace

In resting on thy countenance divine!

How, till the Day of Judgment, I could watch

That, then, your liberated soul and mine

Might clasp each other by the hand, and go

Before the Judge for judgment of our love—

Whether or no it has not been a lark

In the high heaven of its own melody,

Since it was driven forever from the earth?

Oh, could you know how I have longed for death,

So that my soul, set free, might soar to Heaven

And there procure the panoply of grace

To shield your peace from—if not menace—harm!

You are the guardian angel now to me.

Oh, I shall be a hermit and dwell here!

Your tomb shall be my cell. My beads shall be

The memories of all the mirthful hours

We spent together, since our eyes first met

Until the day of days, which hope beheld

Descending from high Heaven to take command

Of all the sun-plumed troop, was backward hurled

With the abruptness of a thunderbolt,

When there was not a cloud in all the sky.

These beads shall I recount beside your bier,

And should I pause, Ginevra, it will be

To shape my meditations and my dreams

Into a crown of art to deck your brow

In the full vision of the world, that all

Who truly love may hail you as their queen.

(He stoops, and lifting the worm, throws it out of the door.)

Out, little brown-earth-worm! I am the page,

Rather than you, to wait upon this queen.

(He kneels, crosses himself before and after a silent prayer, and arising, goes toward the door.)

If I go now to get the things I need,
I can be back ere Florence is awake.

(He goes out of the tomb, and when about to shut the door fast, desists.)

Ah, no, no, no! I circumvent myself
If I disturb the vault door from the way
That it was left—the careless, heartless way!
For, if the door, left open, should be shut,
The news would soon reach Agolanti's ears
And he would know the hand that shut the door,
And take good care, then, to cement it fast.

(Antonio goes into the street and disappears. Ginevra awakes and rises from the bier as if with pain. She steps upon the floor and looks around.)

GINEVRA.

How long have I been here? was it a dream
My feet were fastened?—that I burst the band
And, wild with hope to reach the open door,
I leaped down from this bier, but was swirled round
With giddiness half-way and fell in the dark?
God grant me now the strength to reach the door.

(She moves slowly out of the tomb.)
Out! out! Thank God. Out of the tomb at last!
I will make haste now to my husband's house,
And, if my suffering be the means of grace
For his redemption, I am well content.

(She makes her way to the street, but suddenly stops and utters her words in a moan.)

Yet oh, to live again! God pity me.
I never dreaded death as I dread life.
Oh, death has not such terrors as has life
Devoid of love, that must be lived again!

C U R T A I N .

GINEVRA

ACT IV.

(*Loggia of the Agolanti Palace as in Act II. Bernardo paces up and down, mentally disturbed.*)

FRANCESCO (*pointing to the Cross in the Heavens*)

What can it mean? A sign of the Plague's abatement,
As was the rainbow? Hardly; for the Cross
Is deeper crimson than the setting sun
Upon a sultry day, when it forebodes
A hotter morrow.

BERNARDO (*sharply*)

What it means is plain.

FRANCESCO.

Plain?

BERNARDO.

Nothing could be plainer. 'Tis that Heaven,
Indignant that we have allowed the Turk
To keep possession of the Holy Land,
Has sent an angel host, too dazzling bright
For human eye, to bear the Cross aloft
And by its glory rouse our sleeping zeal.
It has roused me already. I intend,
Francesco, to dispose of all my goods
And lead a Knightly troop to Palestine.

FRANCESCO.

God speed you.

BERNARDO.

Will you come?

FRANCESCO (*laughing faintly*)

No! Italy

Holds me too firmly with her delicate hands
Of Art and Beauty. You can take the fool,
He is good company where cheer is scarce.

Bernardo, let us go.

MOTHER (*opening the door*)

BERNARDO (*pointing to sign over door*)

Look! "Sanitas!"

No one can leave this house.

MOTHER.

I cannot stay.

My anguish here increases. Everything
I see or hear about the place, becomes
The mournful frame of what I fail to see
And fail to hear—my poor Ginevra!

BERNARDO.

Patience

And resignation you have preached to me;
Employ them, or you may disturb her peace.
Enter the house. You need repose.

MOTHER.

Repose?

Oh, how repose when—look! the heavens become
Mount Calvary, whose Crimson Cross looks down
Upon the world with Christ's reproachful glance
To Peter, that he had denied Him thrice.
O God! well may the world weep bitterly,
Like Peter at the crowing of the cock.

BERNARDO (*leading wife towards door*)

Francesco and I have business to transact.

MOTHER (*drawing away and dropping on her knees*)

Wherein have I denied Thee, Lord? By Pride?
Oh, pardon me my least unloving thought
Of those beneath me; as hadst Thou not made

The poor Thy brethren closest to Thy heart,
 And honor them above the rank of Kings
 In being Thyself the most despised of men!
 Ah! rather this has been my grievous sin—
 I put my child before Thee in my love!
 Else, *Thou* wouldst have spared *her* and let her live.
 Oh! I shall wear the weeds of penitence
 And trudge the streets barefooted for my guilt.

(*Rises and enters the Palace.*)

FRANCESCO (*whispering to Bernardo*)

'Tis well that we withheld from both of them
 The knowledge that the Bishop had annulled
 The marriage.

BERNARDO.

I regret it bitterly.

It was unfatherly beyond defense,
 Or hope of pardon. How am I to meet
 My daughter's soul hereafter, as I must,
 Before the Judge of Judges?

FRANCESCO.

Why ask me?

BERNARDO.

Oh, how can I set eyes on her again?
 Not all the fiends in hell can drag me forth
 From out my hiding place to look on her,
 After a crime so heinous! Oh, my God!
 The blush upon my cheek shall burn for ever,
 Like a live coal, though I should expiate
 The infamy by twenty thousand deaths,
 And every death should be a crush of bone
 From heel to skull by inches! inches! inches!

FRANCESCO.

If you have business to transact with me,
 Be quick. I need a change of scene and rest.

BERNARDO (*pointing to the sign on the door*)

There is no change of scene while that is there.

FRANCESCO.

Well, to begin the business, let me say
 It cost me dearly every time the clerk
 Deferred the serving of the Court's decree
 Upon Ginevra. Inasmuch as you
 Coerced the priest with raised sword and not I,
 And held her hand when I put on the ring,
 You must allow me all that I have paid
 For the suppression of the Bishop's verdict.

BERNARDO.

How much?

FRANCESCO.

Two thousand—

BERNARDO.

Zounds!

FRANCESCO (*coolly*)

Not "zounds", but florins.

BERNARDO.

I pay no part of that.

FRANCESCO.

You must pay all.

BERNARDO.

"Must" is a word to menials. Bear in mind,
 Francesco Agolanti, you have failed
 To help me rise to power.

FRANCESCO.

Whose fault was that?

You would not melt like metal to be shaped
 As all men have to do in public life,

But would, forsooth, at once be Vulcan's self!
All that is passed. Now to my claim. The marriage
Was brought about by you; I but complied
To serve your purpose that I might help mine.

BERNARDO (*after pacing up and down*)

Ginevra dying childless—

FRANCESCO.

Oh, I know,

Two-thirds of what she brought me is your due!
And you will get it, less what I disbursed
To balk the Bishop.

BERNARDO (*sharply*)
When?

FRANCESCO.

As soon as the Plague

Has run its course. What is all business now
But mockery? for, haggle as we may,
Only the Plague can figure up a gain.

BERNARDO.

There is no cause for haggling, for two thirds
Mean just two-thirds—no more, no less.

FRANCESCO.

My claim

Is disallowed then? Very well, Bernardo!
But let me tell you that your parsimony,
Which sharpens like your nose and tongue with age,
May be too sharp to serve your purpose well.

BERNARDO.

Two hundred thousand florins are my due.
When shall I get it?

FRANCESCO (*after a pause*)

Just as soon, Bernardo,

As I effect a fortunate alliance.

BERNARDO.

What! have your riotings impoverished you?
 If I get not my due within ten days,
 I shall exact the forfeit—not so much
 For the amount involved; though it will help
 Me to equip a Knightly Company
 To reach the Holy Land—as to avenge
 The wrong my child has suffered at your hands.

FRANCESCO.

What forfeit?

BERNARDO.

Is your memory befogged?

This palace is the forfeit. I took care
 In the agreement not to be befooled,
 For I surmised then what has since occurred.

FRANCESCO.

Ten days! At present I have no resources.
 I have in mind a widow worth my debt
 Many times over, who would gladly help
 Me save my ancient palace from your seizure,
 Provided there be no unseemly haste.

(*The Roysterers are heard shouting.*)

BERNARDO.

All Florence has gone mad. Where are you going?

FRANCESCO (*starting to go*)

Theirs is the only way to foil the Plague.

BERNARDO (*drawing sword*)

Francesco Agolanti! not a step.
 Would you insult my daughter's memory

And, by your rioting ere she is cold,
 Confirm a most atrocious falsity
 Reflecting on her honor as your wife?

FRANCESCO (*placing his hand on his sword but resisting the impulse*)

Bernardo Amieri, you are right.
 Such mad behavior as to dance and sing
 Upon the day she died and was entombed,
 Might look, in sooth, that I believe Ginevra
 Unworthy of a husband's reverence;
 And truly I revere her. Her fair fame
 Needs not the confirmation of strange signs
 And wonders after death, to prove it true.

BERNARDO (*with concern*)

What do you mean, Francesco?

FRANCESCO.

Oh! it troubles

Me sorely when I think of it. Enraged
 By Rumor's blackening bite, Ginevra flung
 Herself upon her knees, and with her eyes
 Turned Heavenward with the whiteness of her soul,
 Prayed that she be permitted to return
 To show me by strange signs that she was pure.

BERNARDO.

God rest her soul.

FRANCESCO.

Amen.

BERNARDO.

Ah! if Ginevra

Is not in Heaven, small chance has any of us.

(*The Roysterers are heard louder*)

Hurry in, lest they see us. Shut the door.

FRANCESCO (*after a pause*)

"Ten days," you say?

BERNARDO (*with determination*)

Ten days at most.

FRANCESCO.

The Plague

May disarrange your schedule, Amieri!

And be more merciful to me than you.

(*Bernardo opens the door, and when Francesco enters the palace, follows him. The Roysterers appear on the street, many of them richly attired women with dishevelled hair and carrying musical instruments. The Chief Roysterer goes to the palace door and pulling down the sign, "Sanitas," throws it to his companions who jump and dance upon it.*)

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Viva Francesco Agolanti!

(*They repeat Francesco's name and cheer lustily.*)

Francesco Agolanti! open the palace door, for we have come on the noblest of missions. We have come to make the most popular citizen of our City the President of the Florentine Republic.

(*They repeat Francesco's name and cheer wildly.*)

Francesco Agolanti, if he had been in office, would never have permitted the Plague, or any other legate of the devil to enter our City.

(*They cheer.*)

Were Francesco Agolanti in office, as he should have been, if the popular will had not been frustrated, the Plague with its hungry troop of evils would not have been allowed to drive us out of our happy homes and provide for us no shelter but the grave.

(*They call out for Francesco.*)

Francesco Agolanti, we call on you to help us out of our trouble. You promised us that if you were ever elected President of the Republic, evils of any kind would be unknown in our City. We call on you now to save us. Come out, or we will apply the torch to every palace in Florence, and, like Nero, dance and sing

at sight of the flames. The city is all plague rubbish anyhow, and might as well go up in one blaze.

JESTER (*entering and in a clear stentorian voice.*)

Francesco Agolanti! Now that your friends have serenaded you, their throats are thirsty. There is no encore to a song like a glass of wine. An empty stomach and an empty flagon are the devil's own match, and what the devil has joined, man should put asunder. Ha! Ha!

(*They cheer the Jester and call out for Francesco.*)

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Francesco Agolanti! Why do you stubbornly keep in doors?

Have you discovered the cloister beneath your palace roof, and found such comfort in it that you already prefer a monk's life, secluded from the world, the flesh and the devil?

JESTER.

I can answer for my master on that score.

ROYSTERERS.

The fool! the fool! Let us hear what the fool has to say on behalf of his master.

JESTER (*pointing at the chief roysterer*)

On behalf of my master, I want to say that you are a cross-eyed, hair-lipped, bald-headed liar!

(*They laugh*)

You could not see straight, though you had a pair of eyes one before the other, like horses going tandem. You have a mouth that is the ugliest instrument of torture in Christendom, for it twists and cracks the bones of truth by an inuendo imputing treason to a faithful wife. If debauchery had left a single honest hair on your head, you would now drop on your knees and mumble your *pater noster* until the Plague comes along, and

catching a glimpse of you, throws up his job in disgust and quits the city rather than touch so vile a monster even with his finger-nail. Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Ha! Ha! Since Francesco Agolanti will not come out, what say you, friends, if we make his fool the President of the Florentine Republic in his stead?

ROYSTERERS.

The fool! the fool! We acclaim the fool the President of the Florentine Republic.

JESTER.

No! No! I protest! I would not give up my liberty to tell the truth without fear or favor or respect of person, for all the Presidencies in the world.

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Your objection is overruled. Up on my shoulders for your inaugural address.

(Seizes the Jester and lifts him on his shoulders.)

JESTER.

Illustrious Florentines! there is an unbroken line of fools in public office down to the days of Solomon; but there is a difference between these fools. Some of them were the wisest men of their times before they entered office and the biggest fools in history, immediately afterward; while others were happy fools at the start and woful wise men at the finish.

ROYSTERERS.

Tell us how to banish the Plague.

JESTER.

Illustrious Florentines! Give me eternity to think that over.

ROYSTERERS.

No! No!

JESTER.

I have already several differences of opinion with the Almighty. Why does not the sun shine at night when there is need of its big lantern, instead of in the day when the light is so strong in your eyes that you walk straight into a puddle?

ROYSTERERS.

Give the answer now, or we will stone you to death.

JESTER.

You shall have the answer by all means, for I am not a saint who can pick up his head from the ground and run away with it in his hand. The answer is, have a new order of things—change the Government.

Whenever in former years, a plague, or a famine, or a drouth, entered our city, you never thought of *making a change in the Government*, but let things go on as they were before. The famine, the Plague and the drouth entered our homes and destroyed them whenever they pleased without so much as asking the city's leave. They should have been declared heretics and burnt at the stake hundreds of miles away from Florence, and that is what I propose to do for the next thousand years, if the gentleman's shoulders sustain my presidency that long.

ROYSTERERS (*in chorus*)

They will! they will!

JESTER.

Furthermore, let me tell you, most illustrious Florentines! that I shall not curry favor with the populace by encouraging any popular delusion, and, therefore, though I should be immediately expelled from my exalted office and driven out of the city, I deny that a dead body has not the breath of life in it. I deny it, for this very night the dead body of my lady gave a sigh that startled me like a clap of thunder, and in good faith, took the breath out of me. I hobbled to Antonio Rondinelli as fast as my legs could carry me.

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Antonio Rondinelli! Ha! ha! ha! The fool knew where to bring the good news. Vulma knew what she was talking about when she said that Francesco Agolanti was the blindest man in Florence.

JESTER.

Ever since, I've been asking myself is there such a thing as death, and have come to believe with the poets that love outlasts the breath of the nostrils, that it survives the senses and all the faculties, and therefore, say I, love each other, O ye Florentines, if you would be immortal!

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

We will be immortals!

ROYSTERERS (*in chorus*)

Yes, immortals! immortals!

(They swing each other by the hand and kiss each other in turn)

JESTER.

By the virtue and power invested in me as the president of the Florentine Republic *pro tem, de facto*, provisional, or perpetual, as the case may be, I proclaim that all lovers in Florence are exempt from Death. (*The Roysterers cheer.*) This edict, however, does not affect those already in their hiding places in the earth, for Florence has housing accomodations for no more than the present generation, and could not even give standing room in the street for a thousandth part of the revered pilgrims of love that would come from the ages that are gone. It would be a blessing though, if all came, for they would crowd out from our city the white livered penitents who, between their whining by day and snoring by night, prevent an honest man from snatching a wink of sleep.

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Now for a triumphal march through the streets of Florence. Pluck down every sign of mourning from the houses on our way,

for when there is no death, why should there be mourning?
Start the Music! March!

(With the Jester remaining on the Chief Roysterer's shoulders, they move away keeping time to the tune of the instruments. The Penitents approach, singing a hymn, and Ginevra's mother opening the palace door, comes out robed in penitential garb.)

MOTHER.

Permit me, dear, kind souls, to follow you
In ceaseless pilgrimage to purge my soul.
I am the greatest sinner in the world;
For they who have large knowledge of God's love,
Sin far more greatly by the smallest slight,
Than those who know not, do by gross offense.
Yea, I shall walk barefoot like all the rest.

(The Penitents continue their march without seeming to heed Donna Amieri, who removes her shoes and throws them on the ground. She follows the Penitents, and as they depart, Ginevra is discovered making her way wearily to the Palace door. Midway, she sees the shoes and puts them on her feet.)

GINEVRA.

O pilgrim! who has cast these shoes away,
I thank you; for my feet, indeed, need warmth.

(Goes to door and knocks, but makes faint sound.)

Oh! were my feet as rapid as my heart,
I might have reached those pious souls in time
To help me wake my husband from his sleep.
Francesco!

(She calls his name several times, then goes to his window and shakes it.)

FRANCESCO *(at window)*

Who is it that calls my name?

GINEVRA.

Ginevra.

FRANCESCO.

Who?

GINEVRA.

Your wife.

FRANCESCO.

That cannot be.

My wife, the pure Ginevra, died to-day,
And at sunset we laid her in the tomb.

GINEVRA.

That well I know, Francesco! but the light
From the triumphant Cross now making morn
Of midnight, touched my eyes, and I awoke,
And you behold me come back from the tomb.

FRANCESCO.

Poor spirit! Go in peace. I shall have masses
Said daily, and give alms for your repose.

GINEVRA.

Open the door, Francesco! I am cold.
My teeth are chattering and my flesh is numb.
I feel the charnel damp in all my bones.

FRANCESCO.

Whether you are Ginevra's soul, or fiend
That takes its semblance, I bid you avaunt!

GINEVRA.

My husband—oh, my husband, feel my hand!
Am I impure that you now shrink from me?

FRANCESCO.

Oh, never purer woman than my wife!
No need has she to come forth from the grave
To prove her sanctity while on the earth.
All Florence was its witness.

GINEVRA.

Still, Francesco,

You thought me faithless!

FRANCESCO.

Never! by the Cross

That shines aloft, I swear it.

GINEVRA.

You did think

Me faithless, for with raised sword you bade me
To show you where Antonio was hid.Ah! the remembrance of that cruel word,
Francesco, stings me—oh, a thousand times
Worse than the charnel house's biting cold!

FRANCESCO.

Not ever in my heart was there one doubt!
I swear it. Falsehood, tho' it drags its victims
In countless thousands to the sepulchre,
Drops dead the instant that it lays a hand
Upon Ginevra Agolanti's name.

GINEVRA.

Ever was I a faithful wife, else, truly,
I would not have returned to-night to you.
Open the door! I perish with the cold.
My head is dizzy and I scarce can stand.BERNARDO (*at window, having thrust
Francesco aside*)

Who is it speaks?

GINEVRA.

Your daughter, your Ginevra.
My father! oh, my father! take me in.

BERNARDO.

Blest spirit! what is it that troubles you?
If harm committed by your hand, or heart,

Impedes your progress to eternal peace,
Tell me what reparation I can make,
And I shall make it.

GINEVRA.

And you doubt me, too,
My father? oh, my father! I could suffer
The Purgatorial pains a thousand years,
Rather than you should doubt me.

BERNARDO.

Peace, poor soul!

I shall have masses said in every church,
And shall distribute alms to all the poor,
And help regain the Holy Sepulchre,
For your soul's comfort and untroubled rest.

GINEVRA.

There is no peace forever now for me.

BERNARDO.

Tell me, dear child, what is it troubles you?
Oh, tell me do you suffer from the curse
Which Holy Writ declares is visited
On children to the seventh generation
For the transgressions of their parents? Speak!

GINEVRA.

Aye verily! I suffer from that curse.
It has brought me to this most wretched plight.

BERNARDO.

Oh, tell me, have the Amieri failed
Ever in duty? They have builded chapels
And hospitals, have fed and clothed the poor,
And they have dashed their blood, like Holy Water,
Into the devil's mocking, Moslem face
In battle for the Blest Redeemer's tomb.

GINEVRA (*with a sigh*)

Oh, Yes! but gifts to God rise black to heaven,
From one with hate of brother in his heart.
Help! I am drenched with death from head to foot.
Oh, let me in to change these charnel clothes
For something warm to wear, and get some food.
I famish with both hunger and the cold.

BERNARDO.

Name me one Amieri who did aught
To draw a curse from heaven upon our house.

GINEVRA.

You, father.

BERNARDO.

I?

GINEVRA.

You, father, by your hate
Of Rondinelli for an ancient wrong.

BERNARDO.

What! If remembrance of a fiendish deed
To my ancestor, draws a curse from heaven,
All justice is but mockery of itself.
Avaunt, deceitful spectre, that would take
My daughter's saintly semblance to torment
Her father, as he ages toward the tomb
Of his ancestors whom he hopes to meet!

GINEVRA.

I am no spirit! Father, feel my hand,
My face, my body. Look,—oh, look! my arm
Has no plague spot, so that there was small reason
To carry me so quickly to the tomb.

BERNARDO.

It cannot be my child. How can it be?
I saw the Plague spot and they shut the tomb.

GINEVRA.

It may be that the venom of the Plague
Was in Francesco's grasp, when by the arm
He seized me and bade me to tell him where
Antonio was hiding in my house.

It made me weep. It may have left a mark,
And any mark will answer for the Plague's
When one has not a friend, nor relative.

Who cares enough to take a second glance.

O Father! look at me. Look once, once only
And you will know your daughter whom you held
When her young hand was chopped off at the heart
Upon the block of marriage to Francesco.

BERNARDO.

Off, hideous fiend! The priest shall bless this house
That you shall never trouble it again. (*Shuts the window.*)

GINEVRA.

My mother! wake. My mother! You will know
Ginevra, and not drive your daughter back
Into the night, when, coming from the grave
All cold and weak, she needs a mother's warmth
And tender care, as when a new-born babe!

Come! look upon me! oh, one glance ! one glance !
Come, you will take my hand and clasp me close.

My mother, oh, my mother! why not come
To your Ginevra? You will recognize
Her features, tho' none else can, as you did
Long years ago when, having strayed from home,
She played within a churchyard, and when night
Fell, cried herself asleep upon a grave.

Come, wash again the grave dirt from my face
With your own hands, and tell me once again:
"There! now you do look like my precious child."
My mother! oh, my mother!—then, farewell!

For if my mother fails to heed my call,
All hope is gone. I go back to the tomb,
To leave which was a rash impiety,
And surely it has met swift punishment.
Lord! pardon; I shall not offend again.

(Gathering up her remaining strength in a supreme effort, she goes on her way back to the tomb.)

C U R T A I N.

GINEVRA

—

ACT V.

(The tomb and street scene as in Act III. Ginevra about to enter the tomb, looks back and takes a few steps aside.)

GINEVRA.

Farewell to life. The sweetness and the warmth
And all the nourishment of mother's milk
Were once in every object in the world.
I drained them as an infant, and grew strong;
But now the milk in everything has turned—
I like its taste no more. O mystic Cross!
But for thy comfort to my soul, I fear
That I would beat my brains out on the tomb.
Thou bringest hope, for oh, thou art engraved
Inside upon eternal glory's gate
And seen, because that gate has opened wide
To all the heavy-hearted on the earth;
And who is heavier of heart than I?

(Antonio appears on the street, garbed like a hermit and carrying a staff and a script.)

Is that a footprint? Does it fare this way,
Or like all others, hasten otherwhere?

(Catching a glimpse of Antonio she raises her voice.)
Oh, is there not one Christian soul in Florence
To take compassion on my woful plight?

ANTONIO *(halting)*

Ginevra's voice and features! Oh, a vision
To mock my heart and soul! For, laid I not
Her lifeless body on the catafalque?
Oh! is my eye conspiring with my ear
Against me for my reason's overthrow?

GINEVRA.

God! is there nothing open now to me
Except the tomb in which they shut me up?

ANTONIO (*dropping the scrip and approaching her*)

Ginevra?

(*Startled at hearing her name and recognizing Antonio, she starts in alarm toward the tomb.*)

Gentle spirit! vanish not.

GINEVRA (*turning toward him*)

Oh, think me not a spirit like the rest,
Antonio! Still, would you had not come!

ANTONIO.

Oh, flesh or phantom, you are my Ginerva!
Oh, all the more if spirit—and how else?
Your faithful fool informed me of your death
And, when I reached the tomb two hours ago,
I raised your lifeless body from the floor
Where they had cast it.

GINEVRA.

I awoke and, when
I tried to reach the door, grew faint and fell.

ANTONIO.

Oh, had I waited just a little while,
What ages of acutest agony
I might have spared you! For to you entombed,
A second must have seemed a century.

GINEVRA (*sighing*)

Yes, when between the steps of halting hope,
A second is, in sooth, a century.
My cry availed not. They who heard me, shunned.

ANTONIO.

I left the tomb just long enough to tell
My relatives of my intent henceforth
To dwell a hermit here.

GINEVRA.

Antonio!

Oh, I am fearful of myself, not you!
 So, go away! I pray you, go away,
 Antonio! Think not my words unkind.
 The end of our long wait is not far off.
 Why for a dew drop at the brink of death,
 Forfeit the ocean of eternal joy?

ANTONIO.

I came back to abide within your tomb
 Until my soul, set free by death, might join
 Your blessed spirit in the happier world;
 And now I find you far from me as ever.

GINEVRA.

Oh, had I not awoke but passed beyond!

(The White Penitents appear chanting the "Misericordia." At sight of Ginevra, her mother breaks from the ranks and approaches her daughter.)

MOTHER.

My God! Is that Ginevra whom I see?
 Is that my daughter whom we laid to rest?
 Speak, oh, my daughter, speak!

GINEVRA (*gazing straight at her mother and instantly turning away*)

My mother? No!

MOTHER (*with eyes and arms lifted toward Heaven*)

Mother of Sorrows! help me! Thou wert never
 Heart-pierced by a sword so sharp, for thou wert never
 Denied by thine own child.

GINEVRA (*lifting her eyes and hands to Heaven*)

No, no! O Mother

Of Sorrows! For thou didst not deny thy child.
When He sought shelter, thou didst give it Him.

MOTHER.

My daughter, who denied you shelter?

GINEVRA.

You!

MOTHER.

I!

GINEVRA.

When my husband drove me from the door,
And then my father bade me not return,
You heeded not my cry.

MOTHER.

My poor Ginevra!

You talk the language of the wildest dream.

GINEVRA.

No dream. On waking in the tomb, I crept
As best I could back to Francesco's house.

MOTHER.

My God! I was not there. I joined these folk
To walk barefoot in penance for my sin
In putting you before God in my love.

GINEVRA.

Oh! it was then your shoes, I found still warm.

(*Throws herself into her mother's arms.*)

Forgive me, mother! for this cruel wrong
That I have done you.

MOTHER (*returning her embrace*)

My Ginevra! child!

My dear dead darling come to life again!

O my Ginevra gone from me for ever,
But found again! Oh, child whom I once more
Find in the churchyard, and take home with joy!

(*Takes off her cloak and puts it on her daughter.*)

GINEVRA.

I feel the cold but little, but my flesh
Hangs heavily on me and drags me down.

ANTONIO (*approaching*)

This, truly, is a night of miracles
Upon the earth as well as in the heavens.

MOTHER (*amazed*)

Antonio Rondinelli?—Child, come home.

GINEVRA.

I have no home.

ANTONIO.

Her husband cast her out.

MOTHER.

You have your father's home.

GINEVRA.

No; he disowned me,
And I shall look upon his face no more.

MOTHER.

Come. You do surely wrong your father, even
As you wronged me. Come, you are perishing.

ANTONIO (*impulsively clasping
Ginevra*)

Come, you are mine. I claim you by the right
Of rescue from the tomb. Be dead to those
Who have disowned you. They have set you free.

MOTHER (*clutching Ginevra and addressing Antonio*)

No! I would rather see my daughter dead
Than go with you while yet Francesco lives.

GINEVRA.

Oh, help me to the nearest convent gate.
There I can rest, and then I can resume
My work among the poor, who have gone crazed
In their affliction and help not themselves,
Nor one another; else, harm more than help.

ANTONIO.

Oh, noble Soul! true to the last *to others*.

(*The Black Company enters with a body. They halt before the tomb, kneel in silent prayer, and chant the customary hymn. Francesco, followed by the Jester, comes nervously on the scene and approaches the Company.*)

FRANCESCO.

Entomb the body quickly. 'Tis no wonder
The Plague is spread thro' Florence, when instead
Of burying the dead without delay,
You kneel in silent prayer and chant your hymn.
Make haste, now, to the Amieri vault.

(*Seeing Francesco, the mother approaches the bier and, lifting the coverlet from the face, utters a piercing shriek.*)

MOTHER.

Bernardo! oh, my husband! noble husband!
What has befallen you? And I away
When at your bedside I was needed most
To help you to prepare your soul for God!

(*Francesco is dumfounded for a moment.*)
Your father, dear Ginevra! 'tis your father!

FRANCESCO.

God! Can this be Ginevra come to life?

It was no apparition then I saw.

(Without looking at her father's face, or noticing Francesco, she lifts up the lifeless arm.)

GINEVRA (*calmly*)

There is no Plague-spot on this arm.

FRANCESCO (*excited*)

There is!

GINEVRA.

I know the mark too well to be mistaken.

FRANCESCO (*to Black Company*)

Haste to the tomb. How dare you tarry?

GINEVRA.

'Tis

No more the Plague-spot than the redness was

Upon my shoulder, from my husband's hand.

(Antonio lifts up Bernardo's arm and uncovers his breast.)

ANTONIO.

These marks are wounds. Sword-thrusts the both of them.

MOTHER.

My God! Francesco, has your argument

About Ginevra's dower with poor Bernardo

Ended in murder?

FRANCESCO.

Murder? No! Bernardo

Was stricken by the Plague. The Jester saw

The Plague-spot on the arm and tolled the bell.

(To Jester)

Did you not see the Plague-spot on the arm?

JESTER.

In good faith, master, I saw the Plague-spot on Bernardo's arm, for being a good servant, I found what I was sent for.

FRANCESCO (*sharply*)

Did you not see the Plague-spot on the arm?

JESTER.

In faith, good master, your word is always good enough for me, for it gets me my meals and shelter. When you told me 'twas there, I knew it without looking. I have no curiosity to inspect a plague, for it is a dog with a bad name, and I keep out of its way. I tolled the bell as well as I could, for my arms were tired with laying down the law as President of the Florentine Republic. I had escaped barely with my life from the honors thrust upon me, when I reached your palace, and was hardly able to differentiate mumps from thumps with the accuracy of a leech.

ANTONIO (*breaking the suspense*)

Francesco Agolanti! 'tis your work.

FRANCESCO.

What! You, Antonio Rondinelli here?

Ginevra's death was only then a ruse,
Concocted by you both when you were cloistered
Beneath my roof? Oh, I was truly blind
And a fit butt for the jest and laugh of Florence!

(*The Captain of the Black Company steps forth.*)

CAPTAIN.

Ginevra Amieri, how believe
My vision? for I laid you in the tomb.

GINEVRA.

I woke, and made my way back to my home.
I should have perished, had Antonio
Not heard my outcry.

FRANCESCO (*exultantly*)

Why should he not hear it?

He was convenient, as of course arranged.

GINEVRA.

God sent him here to save me.

FRANCESCO.

Come!

GINEVRA.

I? Never!

FRANCESCO.

Ginevra, I command you by the right
That marriage gives me to obedience.

CAPTAIN.

Yours was no marriage in the sight of Heaven,
But an abomination. She was never
Your wife, Francesco Agolanti! Never!
For she withheld consent, and I was forced
To act the sacrilege for which, since then,
The tortures of the damned have been my lot.

FRANCESCO (*haughtily*)

By what authority do you annul
The marriage rite which you yourself performed?

CAPTAIN.

By the authority of Holy Church,
Before whose Bishop I set forth the truth
In all its horror. For my human weakness
In letting worldly prudence interfere
With my plain duty, I have been condemned
To silence for ten years from saying mass,
Which was the greatest transport of my soul.

FRANCESCO.

Church, or no Church, Ginerva is my wife.
Come.

ANTONIO.

She shall not. Her heart was ever mine,
As well you knew, and now her hand is mine.

FRANCESCO.

Not while *I* live.

ANTONIO.

You cast her from your door;
I take her to my heart. You made her life
A muffled moan; now I shall make it song.
Your bloody hand shall touch her not again,
And you shall answer for her father's death.

FRANCESCO (*about to draw his sword*)

It shall be bloodier—.

ANTONIO.

Draw it not, base wretch,

Till we have laid Bernardo in the tomb.

The dead deserves that much respect from you.

(Francesco drops sword and turns aside, hearing the shouts of
the revellers advancing.)

MOTHER (*bending over bier*)

Oh, my most noble husband, sent unshaven
Before your Maker by a murderer's hand!
Stabbed in your slumber surely! for awake,
Your skill and strength would have foiled any foe.
Oh, may God's grace have reached you! may one tear
Have welled up from your heart before too late,
And washed you white of black or scarlet stain.

CAPTAIN (*raising mother up and
pointing to the cross*)

Rise, daughter, and be comforted. Behold
Mount Calvary! If Christless is the Cross,
Miss not the meaning of the miracle.
He is not shown in anguish on the Cross
Because He has descended into hell,

Of which unhappy Florence is a pit,
To loose bound souls that they may rise with Him.

(Enter the Roysterers.)

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Francesco Agolanti, if you have become one of the Black Company, why, in the name of common reason, don't you put on their moping robes?

FRANCESCO.

Not I. I am now a free man and ready for any thing you wish. The Presidency of the Republic, or a torch for every palace in Florence, is one to me.

(The Roysterers applaud.)

CHIEF ROYSTERER.

Good! Good! but first, fetch us to your wine cellar, for our throats are parched with thirst. The wine hue from the Cross which all Florence is gaping at, only maddens us that it doesn't turn into liquor for our gullets.

FRANCESCO (*with false gaiety of tone*)

Come along, brave fellows! I have plenty of sparkling vernaccio left, though not a devil of a servant to hand it to us.

ROYSTERERS (*in Chorus*)

We will help ourselves.

(They follow Francesco, and the Black Company lifts the bier.)

ANTONIO.

Come, mother, for, by that endearing name,
You will permit me to salute you now,
And let us take Ginevra to my house,
For she needs nourishment and tender care.

MOTHER (*approaching Captain*)

Good priest, inform me is it true, indeed,
The marriage was annulled by Holy Church?

CAPTAIN.

Most true, my child.

MOTHER.

How did it happen, then,
That poor Ginevra was not told of it?

CAPTAIN.

I do not know. 'Tis sad, but still most true,
 That gold, the root of evil, branches forth
 And forms dense thickets, covering many things
 Which Holy Church intends for public view.
 The marriage was annulled; that much I know.
 Go to the Bishop, who is as unyielding
 To gold, or power, or craft, as truth itself,
 And he will gladly show you his decree.

MOTHER.

Thank God, my children.

(Antonio and Ginevra embrace.)

GINEVRA.

Dear Antonio!

My saviour! for I know no other name
 But that blest one, by which to call you now,
 That you have truly raised me from the dead.

ANTONIO.

I am the one who has been raised from death,
 Far more than you, Ginevra.

GINEVRA.

I was dead

Since you were taken bleeding from my house
 And, then, this ring was stolen from my keep.

(Shows the ring.)

ANTONIO.

Dear, faithful soul! Let no unhappy thought
 Drag back from night's fast hold a single cloud

To mar the morning which is breaking now.
Let us think only how we can thank Him
In our poor human way, for our great joy
Which, still, is sober; for, like all great joy
Upon the earth, it stands beside a bier.

MOTHER.

“There is no dark in life, but trust in God,
If it step boldly, or put forth its hand,
Will find a marble stairway to the stars,
Or balustrade to check its headlong fall.”
O God! I put my hand out in the dark,
Now thick about me. He was taken off
Without a chance to make his peace with Thee
By casting every hatred from his heart!

CAPTAIN.

The Cross on high, that strikes the world to-night,
Is more than Moses’ wand. It smites with love,
And hearts, though hardened into rock, well forth
In copious streams, unseen by mortal eye.

MOTHER.

Oh, heart more kind, or true, was not on earth!

CAPTAIN (*after a pause*)

Brethren, we must go back. We must return
The body where we found it and report
Bernardo’s death was not due to the Plague.
My God! what awful crimes are daily done
And hid beneath the cover of the Plague!

(*The Black Company, chanting, carry the bier, and are followed by the Mother, Ginevra and Antonio.*)

JESTER (*watching procession disappear*)

In good faith, Antonio Rondinelli, your tongue has now good cause to be glib. You can well say, “Peace to both our houses,”

for you are out of the hearing of Bernardo Amieri. Now rises the question which throws all other questions like dishwater out of the window—what is going to become of me? Thus said Cæsar when he saw Brutus, so that, in good sooth, there is good historical warrant for the question. Whose fortunes am I to follow? If I follow those of my master, Francesco Agolanti, I shall surely go to the devil, and hell is not the place for me. Ha-ha! There are too many damned fools there already, so that even the President of the Florentine Republic would cut no figure there. I shall stick to my mistress, like Antonio, and thereby, hit two birds with one stone; for like him, I shall then be happy both in this world and the next. Ha-ha! ha-ha-ha-ha! ha-ha!

But what if young Rondinelli should bear me a grudge for snarling at his approach and howling for his absence as the only bone to my relish? Ha-Ha! I have it. Good intentions on my part and lack of wit on his part. I played the dog at his heels just to *warn him* to keep out of harm's way; for any Christian Knight who was good enough to be favored by my mistress, Ginevra, with her heart, was certainly good enough to be favored by her dog with a howl when calamity was at hand. Ha-Ha! I shall get a fine coat for those good intentions that I should have had. 'Tis by such a swop that half the great men of the world get their gold lace and velvet doublets, and manage to keep themselves from running about stark naked, so that the poor fool is no worse than his betters.

(The chanting of the Black Company dies away, and the Jester, looking up at the Cross, is awe-struck and becomes reverential in his tone and demeanor.)

How wonderful that Cross is! It is the Glory of the Lord and its brightness is too great for me to look upon; for I am only a poor "publican" like the one spoken of in the Gospel. Lord, have mercy on me and on every other poor fool in the world.

C U R T A I N .





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